



Centre for Peace and
Development Initiatives

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CPDI Right to Information Watch

Editorial:

Greetings from the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives, (CPDI).

It is a cliché to say that good governance is irrevocably linked with transparent functioning of government but a cliché worth repeating at the start of the new year. One common denominator of both PPP government from 2008 to 2013 and on-going PMLN government is the public pledges about right to information legislation that have never been backed up with action on the ground.

Why successive governments have not followed up their hallowed political pronouncements about good governance with concrete actions in the shape of legislation on right to information? Is it because of the supposed opposition by the security establishment that is often flaunted by some politicians in seminars and conferences? Let us examine the merit of this argument. Legitimate security needs of the state, as we have often maintained, are adequately protected in right to information laws and same is the case in the Right to Information Bill 2016 approved by Senate Committee on Information and Broadcasting. Furthermore, if political leadership truly believes in the irrevocable link between good governance and transparency, then how can it sacrifice resultant good governance through effective right to information legislation on the altar of perceived notions of threat to national security? What is even more troubling is that the political leadership seems to have lost the battle without entering into a fight.

Instead of using the issue of right to information legislation to recapture lost space in the perennial saga of civil-military relationship and supporting the Right to Information Bill 2016, PMLN government has caved in on this issue and dumped the Senate bill. As a result, federal bureaucracy has seized the opportunity and has drafted for the government an excuse of a right to information law in the shape of the Right of Access to Information Bill, 2016 which will allow it continue functioning in its secretive ways.

RTI Legislative Landscape

Another public pledge on right to information legislation that could not be kept:

As was reported in [Dawn](#) on December 01, 2016, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Maryam Aurangzeb said RTI bill would be presented in next National Assembly session. Well, we waited with baited breath but the last session of the parliament ended on December 30th, 2016 but federal government did not table its bill. Ms. Maryam Aurangzeb joins list of information ministers like Ms. Sherry Rahman, Mr. Qaira, Ms. Awan, Mr. Pervez Rasheed who publicly pledged about legislation on right to information but were unable to carry it out during their tenures.

Instead of enacting right to information law, government is more concerned about preventing unauthorised leakage of information as reported by Sayed Azaz in the story titled [Govt takes steps to stop leakage of classified information](#).

It is heartening to note that media is documenting failure of the government in legislating an effective right to information law. The case in point is the story filed by Umar Cheema, [Right to know faces another blow in 2016](#), and the editorial, [No right to know](#), based on this story published in the News.

RTI in Action

RTI for investigative reporting:

Journalists have continued using RTI laws for investigative reporting during the month of December. An interesting story was filed by Dawn reporter Mr. Manzoor Ali, [Most treasury members part of KP's power structure](#). Fakhar Durrani, also contributed two stories based on information received or not received through the use of Freedom of Information Ordinance 2002, [State Life directed to provide info under Freedom of Information Ordinance](#) and [Defence ministry refuses to share info under RTI law](#).

Ismaeel Khan of Dawn, Peshawar, using Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Act 2013 raised some questions about the way public funds are being used in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on advertisement in a story titled [Question mark over KP govt's multi-billion rupee ad contract](#).

Riaz Khan Daudzai, the News, Peshawar contributed an investigative story based on information received through the use of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Act 2013 titled [KP Assembly spent over Rs5.3m on entertainment last fiscal](#).

RTI for political ends:

Recently, there has been an interesting use of the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013. Ms. Andleep Abbas of PTI has started using the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013 to ask pertinent questions to Punjab government. Based on requests for information filed by Ms. Abbas, stories like [PTI to further squeeze CM Shahbaz](#), [PTI questions Punjab govt's plan to procure jet for CM](#) and [PTI quizzes Punjab about 1000-plus POs on the loose](#).

Punjab Information Commission and its Verdict on Orange Line Project:

Punjab Information Commission's decision on information request about Orange Line project was within the bounds of its law but many people criticised it without reading the story [Orange Line agreement terms can't be shared: commission](#).

The Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013 and Metro Bus Project:

There have been many questions about Metro Bus Project and it is heartening to see that a concerned citizen in Rawalpindi is using the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013 to find answers as reported in the story [RDA directed to provide details about Metro Bus Project](#).

Transparency and Right to Information Program

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